# No. 9. On the Love of God.

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Mark 12th—30th.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, & with all thy Soul, & with all thy Mind, & with all thy Strength. This is the first Commandment.

The Love of God is a sentiment not dictated by nature, but prescribed by Revelation. That God should be the object of terror to his Creatures, & should avenge himself upon all that do evil, is an apprehension implanted in the human mind; but that He should engage our love and become the moral delight of his offspring—for this ground of comfort, and assurance of consolation, we are indebted to the law delivered by Moses, and to the Gospel revealed by Jesus Christ.

Such is the origin of this divine principle! But, like many of Heaven's best gifts, by some it is admitted with caution, by others, received with coldness, and even rejected with disdain. To love God is considered as not suiting to our depraved nature, or adapt=

ed to our moral state: it is thought a degree of evangelical refinement beyond what our present circumstances and corrupt principles will bear—and that, if we fulfil, with tolerable exactness, the moral precepts of the Gospel, nothing more will be expected of us. It is from this opinion, so diabolical in its nature, and so fatal in its effects, that the Christian world—like a River overflowing its Banks—is so deluged with wickedness.

The reasonableness of the Duty of loving God will appear from taking a review of his Goodness towards us.

He is a Being infinitely good.—He is the sole Author of all the happiness we can hope for, or receive, either here or hereafter.

To his Creatures—"the works of his hands," He hath manifested the greatest tenderness and compassion. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but, that the

"wicked turn from his evil way & live:"—to which he adds with all the fervor of affection & the earnestness of Concern, "turn ye, turn ye from your evil "ways, for why will you die?"

But above all, He has signally expressed his love in the Redemption of our souls, through the Atonement of his only-begotten & dearly beloved Son. For our sakes He debased himself to the lowest condition—He willingly undertook, & chearfully encountered, and patiently underwent sorrow, pain, & death to accomplish our salvation.

Here let us add the many calls and invitations to Repentance and Amendment of life every Sinner may recollect—sometimes outwardly, by the ministry of the word—sometimes inwardly, by the suggestions of the Spirit, to direct him to good, and withdraw him from evil.

But the necessaries, the conveniencies, the comforts of life are, all, likewise, derived from God:—

health, strength, food, and raiment, are all owing to God's indulgent care over us, and his overflowing goodness to us. Every day we live gives us repeated experience of his wonted bounty and especial concern for man. The natural course of things, with a thousand voices, proclaims them to us, too loud not to be heard, and too convincing not to be regarded. And such is the sense we have of his goodness to us, that, in distress, we all naturally look up to God—when human help fails, we have recourse to divine. "For the Lord is a Refuge for the oppressed, a Re-
"fuge in time of trouble. He satisfieth the empty
"soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.—
"Look at the generations of old and see, did any ever
"trust in the Lord, and was forsaken? Or whom
"did He ever despise that called upon Him.—They
"that seek the Lord shall not want any thing that is
"good. This poor man," said the Psalmist, this or that poor wretch "cried unto the Lord, and the Lord

"heard him and saved him out of all his trouble."—

Now, seeing God, by so many real evidences both to our souls and bodies, expresses his love and care to all mankind, in general, and to every one, in particular—can we reasonably do otherwise than follow the inference of the Apostle, "let us, therefore, love "God, because He first loved us." The measure of our love is prescribed in the text, with all thy Heart, &c.

Obedience to God's commands is, indeed, the surest Test of our love. We may make long prayers, be very devout, take every opportunity of receiving the blessed Sacrament, bring up our families with the very rigor of devotion, allow no intemperate mirth, forbid even innocent amusements, punish every Deviation from Rectitude, & yet still be far, very far, from loving God "with all all our heart, and soul, and mind, "and strength." Are we candid in our opinions of others? Do we lean always to the favourable side—careful to conceal or extenuate—not to publish or ex-

aggerate their faults? And, as to our own dealings, can we challenge Slander to convict us of Injustice? Do we behold our own cause through the same medium we do that of others? Are pride, insolence, oppression, banished from our breasts? Are we careful to give no offence by stubbornness of mind or outrageousness of temper? From our meekness & quietness, and promoting the peace & comfort of all with whom we are connected, is it evident "that God is in us of a truth?" For the love of God renews the whole man.—And if we have not subdued our petulant humours, if we have not conquered our vicious inclinations, we may rest assured "that the love of God is not in us." Whoever occasions uneasiness to others, either by injustice, slander, perverseness—if such an one says he loves God—the scriptures declare him "to be a liar—he "deceives his own heart and his Religion is vain." He may be said to love God as the Pharisees did, who "devoured widows' houses, & for a pretence made long

"prayers; ye shall receive the greater Damnation."—

The love of God, as we are Christians, consists in the prevalence of our affections to God above all things. Religious offices are to be performed, not as the tasks of duty, but the services of delight. In praying for Blessings—in returning thanks for Mercies—in acquainting ourselves with the word and will of God we are to find pleasure. Our heart is to be devoted to God—"for his servants we are"—him we love to whom we pay voluntary obedience. Whether we fulfil the first Commandment—whether "we love "God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and "strength"—as it behoves us assuredly to know, let us impartially inquire of ourselves—God grant our Hearts may bear the investigation! Do we then make the Gospel the rule of our Conduct? Do we read it with attention, consider it with seriousness, and observe it with fidelity? Do we observe the Lord's-Day with the Reverence so sacred an in-

ſtitution demands? Do we regularly attend public worſhip ourſelves, and oblige our Families to do the ſame? Do we apply what we hear to our own caſe and circumſtances, and thereby become better and more religious men? Do we every day pour out our ſouls in fervent prayer to God to deliver us from evil, and to confirm us in goodneſs? And, to communicate the Bleſſings of Chriſtianity, do we, daily, aſſemble our families to worſhip God? Does it appear by our temper and our conduct, under whoſe banners we have enliſted, and whatever we think, or ſay, or do, does it all, ultimately, conduce to the glory of God?

By Queſtions ſuch as theſe, we may know of a truth, whether "we love God with all our heart, "our ſoul, our mind, and ſtrength," or not. Let us be perſuaded to put them fairly, and not ſhrink from the anſwers.—One man will find, inſtead of loving God in the manner preſcribed to inſure his Sal=

vation, he loves every thing but God—where an hour is employed on the thoughts of futurity, months and years are devoted to the purſuits of pleaſure, or the improvement of wealth. Another will be enabled to correct the miſtake in which he may have lived all his life long, that to attend the ſervice of the Church and ſometimes to receive the holy Sacrament—to fulfil the common duties of morality—and not to be exceedingly profligate—to ſwear, perhaps, without thought, or when he is rejoiced, or when he is provoked, that, ſuch an one loves God and needs not doubt of his Salvation. Dangerous Deluſion! Let him diligently peruſe the Scriptures, and he will find that the terms of Salvation differ widely from this pagan ſyſtem. We are to "be renewed in the ſpirit of our "minds"—We are not allowed, by the Goſpel, the indulgence of any one ſin—unleſs God has the firſt place in our affections we are not Chriſtians—unleſs our Piety, Devotion, Charity, proceed from a Love of

God, & not from Education, Custom, or natural Tenderness, the Gospel is lost upon us. For all these virtues adorned the Heathens, who never heard the name of Christ, & on whom, with its faintest Beams, the Sun of Righteousness never shone. From devout affections & exemplary conduct, we are to judge of our love of God. If we love God, "we shall bless Him all the Day long, and shew "forth his Salvation."

The Love of God, as it is the first & great Commandment, so it is the first principle of Christianity. Should you ask any man, who has not set common decency at defiance, the question—whether he loved God or not—he would think you injured him by seeming to doubt of it. But, in so important a point, let no man deceive himself—for, to repeat what has been before observed—if we love God we shall delight to converse with Him in his appointed Ordinances. Prayer, thanksgiving, meditation, hearing & reading the word, receiving the Sacrament, accompanied with inviolable

Integrity, are the infallible proofs of our love of God. But if, instead of affording us pleasure, these duties are irksome, and we discharge them, not with Alacrity, but Indifference, we are not religious, we are only moral—"the Love of God is not shed abroad in our hearts." Many examples in the heathen world may be produced of strict Justice and undeviating Probity; but if Christianity consisted in the practice of moral virtue, the Death of Jesus Christ, and the Revelation of the Gospel had, surely, been superfluous.

Suffer me, in conclusion, earnestly to exhort you, my Brethren, to cultivate this Love in your Hearts, and to "nourish it with all goodness"—let me prevail on you, if ye have any regard for the peace of your mind—if you have any anxiety about the security of your Salvation—if you have any dread of the vengeance of Almighty God, let me, beseech, exhort, conjure you to keep "the first Commandment."

If you refuse to fulfil the terms of Salvation—no doubt you are prepared with the Apology you design to offer—the persuasive Apology which is to appease the wrath of a justly-incensed God. What is the excuse Ingenuity can suggest, and Presumption plead for having rejected the Gospel and disobeyed the Command—the first & great Command of your Creator, your Redeemer, and Judge? We are, unequivocally, and peremptorily, commanded to "love the Lord our "God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and "strength." From this source, our every action, & our every thought are to arise.—Though "we give to "every one that asketh us"—though we discharge all our moral obligations with the strictest fidelity—if we do not love God—if God has not the first place in our affections—what was said of the young man in the Gospel, may, with equal justice, be applied to us—"yet one thing thou lacketh." Let us rather endeavor to arrive at that state of evangelical Righteous-

nefs, which confifts in "loving God with all our heart, "and foul, and mind, and ftrength;" for then, and then only, can we judge with certainty, and conclude with confidence that we are in a ftate of Salvation.

In a matter of fuch unfpeakable moment, where our fouls and our everlafting happinefs are at ftake, grant us, gracious God! to be no longer under the delufion of error, or the anxiety of fufpence. Implant deep in our Hearts the love of thy name. We defire to love Thee above all things, and befeech Thee, from the bottom of our fouls—that, actuated by this divine principle, after having lived "in that perfect "Love which cafteth out fear"—we may die in thy favor, and be received by thy mercy, through the merits and fatisfaction of thy Son our Lord.

Theoph^s. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers Hall.